

Land Acquisition Committee
Minutes of Meeting
March 10, 2015
Lower Level Conference Room
Town Hall – 10 Mudge Way

PRESENT: Don Cullis, Chair; Lori Eggert; Caroline Fedele; Tom Mulligan;
Daniel Puffer; William Speciale; Richard Torti

Elizabeth Bagdonas, Conservation Administrator

ABSENT:

The meeting began at 7:35 pm.

Mr. Cullis and Ms. Fedele reported on their meeting with Planning Director Glenn Garber. The purpose of this meeting had been to devise a strategy for addressing open space and other land acquisition objectives of the Comprehensive Plan. There was not a significant amount of time devoted to properties/areas to be covered by other Town agencies. Communication should be set up between the Land Acquisition Committee (LAC, or committee) and these groups. Additional recreation fields were needed for sports such as field hockey and lacrosse. A discussion of the ORASC (Outdoor Recreation Area Study Committee) report followed, with the comment made that the results should be fleshed out. Larger fields closer to the center of Town were needed. The committee agreed to arrange a meeting with the Recreation Committee.

Ms. Fedele stated that the meeting with Mr. Garber had been a good one. She stated that the Selectmen should be consulted for guidance and focus on what objectives the committee should pursue. The objectives of the Comprehensive Plan should be coordinated with this guidance. Although the Selectmen had developed a charge for the committee, a meeting with them on these subjects was overdue. Among the subjects to discuss with them would be whether or not the committee should initiate contact with the owners of either small or large parcels. The Comprehensive Plan focus would be to let the town know what the focus might be. If people in town were able to get the idea that their land might be of interest to Town needs and potential acquisition, they would be more likely to contact the committee. Both felt that the committee was not missing anything, but need the Selectmen to confirm this. Representatives of the LAC should also go before other committees and listen to their objectives, such as the Recreation and School Committees.

Ms. Bagdonas explained the history of the current charge, in that the Selectmen specifically wanted the committee to look at other land uses as well as open space. Ms. Fedele stated that most of the recent discussion has been in relation to fields, but that Recreation and School Committees have been absent from this discussion. The LAC should meet with them and determine whether or not they want it to research appropriate areas.

Mr. Cullis stated that the LAC should let them know it was looking for likely parcels, and should find out what the criteria are.

Ms. Fedele feels that there is a disconnection, and that an open conversation is necessary in order for the LAC to be productive. Ms. Bagdonas suggested using the Town Report to make the committee's efforts more widely known; Ms. Fedele favored other media, such as the Town web site and newspaper reports of meetings with the Selectmen. The Community Preservation Committee should also be involved, and all agencies should be informed on where the focus will be. Ms. Bagdonas pointed out that the Selectmen have been involved in recent land acquisition. The committee felt that a goal should be set for a particular piece of land; long-term goals should be set, with other projects such as easements pursued along the way.

Mr. Cullis then went over the agenda, stating that the first action item would be to meet with the Selectmen. He asked the committee if it preferred to vote on pursuing specific open space parcels or wait for particular needs to arise. Ms. Fedele suggested choosing a few examples to show the Selectmen. Mr. Cullis then suggested a quick review to identify potential recreation parcels from the Areas of Acquisition Interest list.

Ms. Fedele suggested fields as the focus, asking what the future needs would be, beyond the ORASC report. The schools were apparently working on a needs plan, and there were questions about acquisition, maintenance, and sources of funding, such as grants. She favored collaboration between all groups. Mr. Cullis asked what the smallest size of a field would be. The ORASC report had identified newer developing sports, such as lacrosse and field hockey. Recent youth sports would depend on multi-use fields – long enough for football and wide enough for soccer. Ms. Fedele stated that she knew some rough dimensions. She felt that if land were developable, it would work for fields as well. However, the group was not aware of any such large lands. Redevelopment of the Town Campus was being considered, including moving grass fields to more remote areas. There should be more analysis of particular field use, which now seemed to focus on soccer. The Fields Partnership also exists as a working group.

Mr. Cullis would like to see a weighing system for minimum 2-acre parcels in proximity to the schools. Ms. Fedele also suggested looking at the outskirts of Town, such as the State area recently proposed for a salt shed, and the Crosby Drive area, where a wider view might yield possibilities on lands with long-term vacancies.

Ms. Eggert agreed to contact John Willson, Chair of the Conservation Commission, for any contacts he might be able to develop with Harvard University. The committee agreed on a "short list" of Parcels E, G, H, P, Q and S, to identify what criteria might differentiate one from another. The Shawsheen Cemetery might be considered as an interim site.

Ms. Bagdonas will forward the committee PDF maps of the parcels identified for discussion at the next meeting (E, G, H, P, Q and S). Chris Nelson, the Town GIS analyst, will be invited to the next meeting, and will be contacted to provide a large format Town parcel map.

A motion was made by Mr. Cullis and seconded by Mr. Mulligan to approve the minutes of May 8, 2014. The motion passed 3-0-1, with Ms. Fedele abstaining.

The committee confirmed that the minutes of the meeting held on December 9, 2014 and of the Executive Session held on the same date had been approved on January 13, 2015, contingent upon a correction to be made that Mr. Speciale had been present. Ms. Bagdonas will make the correction.

The minutes of January 13, February 12, and March 10, 2015 will be put forward to the April 14th agenda.

Mr. Torti reported on contact he had made with John Lyons, Director of Administrative Services at Middlesex Community College. He stated that Mr. Lyons is open to additional trail ideas; Ms. Bagdonas will work on a map showing the Bay Circuit Trail on the MCC land.

The committee members agreed to schedule the next meeting on Tuesday, April 14th at 7:30 pm.

At 9:00 pm a motion was made by Mr. Cullis and seconded by Mr. Speciale to adjourn the meeting; the motion passed 7-0-0.

Minutes prepared by Elizabeth Bagdonas.

Minutes approved at meeting of April 14, 2015.